IMPEDIMENTS TO YOUTH DEVELOPMENT IN NIGERIA: COUNSELLING INTERVENTION AND POLICY IMPLICATION

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Abstract

This paper has advanced the need for youth development and highlighted some of the psychological, economic and social impediments to youth development in Nigeria, it has also proposed ways in which counseling can enhance optimal youth development and raised policy issues that are of relevance to youth development in the country.

Introduction

Development at any level of society depends on a number of factors which can be broadly classified into two, namely: human and material resources. Material resources refer to natural and manmade goods, which are used to produce other goods as well as money. Human resource on the other hand, is the work force of a nation. According to Ekoja and Akume (2002), this is the active population whose mental and physical efforts are required to manipulate all the other endowments in the environment in order to bring about development. The quality and quantity of human resources have a significant effect on the rate and level of development in any society.

Youth refers to that stage of human development when the individual transits from' adolescence to adulthood. It loosely covers the age bracket of 20 - 35 years. This is a stage of life in which the individual bubbles with a lot of energy. In Nigeria, youth occupies a strategic position in-national development. According to Ochekpe (1997), in Rimfat (1999), they constitute 47% of the economically active population. Rimfat (1999), maintains that youths are expected to be the pillars-and vanguard of accelerated development, the reservoir of energies of our nation. It implies therefore that youth development would translate to overall national development.

Unfortunately, however, the youth of Nigeria, rather than contribute to national development,. have indulged themselves in diverse anti-social ills, with attendant consequences such as indiscipline, arson, armed robbery, assault, rape, ritual practices, cultism, examination malpractice, drug abuse and political thuggery. This represents a worrisome scenario in our drive towards national development.

Aspect of Youth Development

Youth need to be developed in various aspect of their personalities. These include cognitive development which refers to the nurturing of the mental capacities to enhance their power of abstraction and logical reasoning as well as affective development which is the process of refining their feelings, emotions and morals. The last area of youth development is the acquisition of appropriate usable skills, which would enhance their physical productivity.

Lack of adequate development in any of these aspects of personality has the effect of rendering the youth ineffective in their individual lives and increases their tendency to indulge in anti-social activities. In Nigeria, optimal development of the youth impeded by a number of factors, which include the following.

Psychological Factors

Many of the anti-social tendencies that youth 'manifest can be traced to early childhood experiences. Personality formation, according to the psychoanalytical school of psychology is greatly influenced during the individual's first five years of existence. Sigmund Freud's psychosexual theory explains maladaptive behaviours in later life (youth and adulthood) as a result of fixation and regression as certain stages of personality development. For instance, a 2-year of old child of parents who rigid and over-demanding in toilet training would experience a "conflict of wills" (Allen, 2000). That is, the dilemma of deciding whether to do the parents wish or to decide for oneself. The child often experienced frustration and pressure to do the parents' wish. Such experience can carry over to later situations-in life,-sometime building to rebellion against such authority figures as schoolteachers, police and other constituted authority. This is fixation. When put under pressure, a fixation person shows regression, which is retreating to behaviour leading to feelings and thoughts typical of the earlier

fixation stage.

Personality maladjustment is also convincingly explained in Eric Erikson's psychological theory. The psychological standpoint is that a well-adjusted individual must satisfactorily overcome the developmental tasks posed especially during the first four stages of the eight stages of life. Inability of an individual to overcome a particular stage would make him vulnerable to maladjustment in later stages. For example, if during adolescence, an individual is not able to overcome the task of identity vs role confusion, he would graduate into the youthful stage of life being unable to perform, appropriate social roles in his community.

Economic and Social Factor

The sickly Nigerian economy has contributed immensely in retarding youth development in", the country. Youth is the stage life when graduate from various levels of tertiary education. It is a' stage during which the individual should start his career in gainful employment.

Inability of youth to find gainful employment in the formal sector compels them to seek livelihood in such illegal activities as prostitution, armed robbery and thruggery. Many of them have gone into drug trafficking where they are used by the elders to hawk and sell drugs (Acheme, 2003): Most gruesome today, is the fact that the elders in the society who are supposed to lead and direct these young people are the ones who use them to commit crime. Acheme (2003), observed that the elders now resort to the use of children and youths to traffic drugs because of their innocence and the fact that when they are caught, they are usually considered to be too young to face prosecution. In communal clashes and political unrest, it is not uncommon to see the youth involved because they cannot find gainful employment. Just a little token given to them is enough to make them agree to commit any type of crime. Recently, in North Bank area of Makurdi the capital of Benue State, a number of these youngsters were arrested for slaughtering a four-year-old boy. The purpose was to sell the blood to an Alhaji for a ritual. In many areas of Makudi and other towns within Benue State today, one could see all kinds of vigilante groups trying to protect innocent citizens and their possessions from the activities of the youths. The situation is not different from what is experienced in other towns all over the country. Lives and properties are no longer safe. Where the youth is neglected and abused they fall prey to all kinds of social vices. The Nigerian child today suffers from all kinds of abuse, physical, psychological and economic. The child can only learn and emulate those values and behanviours that are presented to him/her by the adult society. What we see today in our youth is a reflection of what our adult society is.

Problems Hindering Youth Development
a.   Early Influences and Personality Development

Every individual has a relatively unique and enduring set of psychological tendencies. This he she reveals in the course of his or her transactions with various social environments such as home, school. and the community. It is assumed that as children grow up, inherited biological tendencies interact with environmental influences. The consequences of this is that they gradually develop characteristic patterns of behavioural such as the outward and visible signs of inner moral values, traits, habits, cognitive structures and needs which become progressively resistant to change with maturity.

/.   ***The Home:*** Psychologists generally agree that an infant's first human relationship forms the foundation stone of his or her developing personality. Healthy adjustment depends upon the adequate satisfaction of the infant's need for certain actions. For example, nurturant care, warm and affectionate communication, attention, play and other stimulants. All these flow from the feeling and attitude of love. Children generally try to. please their parents in order to win their love and approval. They thus, imitate attitudes and behaviours that they observe in the home, try to master skills, they are taught and much of the time try to be obedient. Erickson (1965), in support of this view observed that during the period in infancy a baby learns whether the world is a good and satisfying place to live in or a source of pain, frustration and uncertainly. These contrasting points of view, he calls "basic trust" and "basic mistrust".

According to Berryman, Hargreaves, Herbert and Taylor (1991), neglect, abuse and indifference are all major obstacles to the development of a perception of a benign and predictable world in which children feel secure enough to initiate independence - seeking and perceiving their own action as having meaningful consequences. Such influences are likely to produce a child who behaves in

troubled-and troublesome manner. The child's first five years of life is commonly believed to constitute a 'critical' or 'sensitive'[1] period when he shows a heightened susceptibility to the effects of his environment and is therefore vulnerable to adverse experiences and learning situations. Berryman, Hargreaves, Herbert and Taylor (1991), cited the writings of Plato, the Bible, the Jesuits and Psychoanalysts as believing that character is so set by about the age of six or seven that whatever happens to a child thereafter is but a ripple on the surface. A lot of patterns in Nigeria today seem to be unaware of the importance of their early relationship with their children. They are too busy chasing after money and materials to the detriment of their children's proper moral and social upbringing, Children are therefore left at the mercy of housemaids who themselves need looking after. Many of these children grow up not to understand the meaning of love as they never had any. This deprivation can result in conduct disorder. The tendency of such a child to be lured into criminal acts is high because having never enjoyed love and affection he cannot give in return. Bowling's findings in Feldman (1987) related maternal deprivation of affection to the development of criminal or psychopathic behaviours.

II   *The School:* The school more than being an agent of learning is also an agent of socialization. In our schools today, (primary, secondary and tertiary institutions), little attention is given. Buildings are dilapidated, textbooks are hardly available while available ones are out of reach of the common man. Furthermore, teachers are frustrated because of non-regular payment of salaries. All these have resulted into changes of values for both teachers and students. The attitude of teachers and administrators to the general atmosphere of the school may not be conducive to a child's learning process. He may not be motivated to study or he may lack intellectual discipline for achievement. Since schooling is synonymous with occupational training, without adequate training or learning the youth lack the skills to secure and hold jobs. They may eventually escape to short-run gratifications, such as truancy, liquor, drugs and stealing.

III. The Community: The child is a product of the community in which he lives. If the community is sick, individuals within that community are affected. A look at our community today reveals so many ugly trends. Parents have abandoned their roles in the homes, teachers have turned their backs to their jobs, the police that is supposed to a friend of the people is much dreaded and soldiers who are sent to keep peace turn on the same citizens they are supposed to protect to rape and kill them. Our leaders who take oath to be of service to the nation loot the country's treasury and enrich themselves. Consequently, there is lawlessness and crimes are committed indiscriminately. The youth grows up in this community and this is the model available lo him to emulate as he develops the attributes and values available to him.

Perhaps the most nagging obstacles lo youth development is the absence of role models in the society. As Rimfat (1999 p.14), laments:

> The country seems to be passing through a stage in its development where the ideals of honesty and integrity are no longer cherished. Vices are not punished neither are merits rewarded. People arc accorded recognition and respect in public gathering by virtue of the amount of wealth they have acquired. The youth need to imitate virtues form the adult society. Presently in Nigeria, adults are involved in corruption, election rigging, Sugar Daddyism, Sugar Mummyism, drug trafficking etc. The Nigerian youth therefore suffers from death, of models from whom to copy the ideal life. Peer culture has assumed the center stage in youth orientation and socialization. Peer values, attitudes and norms often run contrary to societal ideals. They are however very important in shaping the lives of youths through their bandwagon effect. In the absence of any institutional structures to check youthful impulses, the youth are open to the contagious influence of such vices as alcoholism, drug addiction, prostitution, etc.

Counseling for Youth Development in Nigeria

Optimal development of youth in Nigeria can be achieved if conscious efforts are made by government, the adult society, the education process, parents and the youth themselves. The professional counselor whose duty it is to help individual better understand themselves and their' environment and circumstances with a view to enabling them change their maladjustment behaviours to more desirable ones has a central role to play in this venture. Counseling for youth development can be carried out in the following ways.

Counseling in Effective Parenting

Group and individual counseling should be given to parents on how best to bring up their children especially during the first 15 years of life. This is because the early years not only lay the aspect of that person, making him or her what he or she will become. There is a sense in which this is irrevocable - it may be difficult or impossible to alter the individual who has been formed in a particular way (Berryrnan, Hargreaves, Herbert and Taylor, 1991).

Effective parenting focuses on enhancing two types of relationships, the parents/child and the parent/parent. Parent/child relationships deals with the best ways that parents should handle their children for their proper upbringing. Parent/parent relationship involves the nature of interactions that take place between the parents themselves. Parents are to be reminded that the way they relate to each other has impact particularly in the children's social development. Parents who fight, quarrel and snob other will produce children who will grow up to be rude, violent and generally undisciplined in late life.

Training in Sublimation

Sublimation is a psychoanalytical term which refers to the act of channeling primitive Iibidinal energies to more socially rewarding activities. The youth needs to be instructed on ways of

transferring their energies From such vices as rape or thuggery to desirable actions like games and sports. The counselor can identify such desirable alternatives to which the youth can redirect their energies.   J

Poor Counselling

Counselors can use members of peer groups themselves to help their counterparts overcome some youthful vices. The counselor, working in a school or community can identify brilliant and disciplined youths who he can co-opt into his counseling programme. These would be exposed to basic counseling skills and principles. If properly arranged, this idea can help provide helping services to peer groups much more than the counselor alone could ever do.

Policy Implication

The counselor alone may not able to properly implement certain measures to enhance youth development. The government, which has the statutory responsibility for youth development must commit herself, at the levels of policy formulation and implementation in the following areas, ass education, job creation and intensify campaigns for value re-orientation.

The need for education and the right to it are universally recognized. Bamanja (2000), quotes Article 26 of the universal declaration of Human Rights of 1948 which states that everyone has a right to education and it shall be free at least elementary stage. According to Akume (2004), education . when properly acquired, equips the individual to uphold and refine the values, beliefs and traditions of the society. Education equips individuals for effective living in their society. If there is functional Mass Education Programme in the country, majority of the young people will get educated and their personal development will become easier. To this end, the introduction of the Universal Basic Education Programme is highly commendable. The programme should be sustained to achieve results.'.

Government at various levels should consciously work out policies that will enhance job creation t accommodate qualified youth in gainful activities. Training programmes in various-vocations should be organized for youth. Giving loans to graduands to enable them start useful ventures on their own is also required.

Community counseling centers should be established in strategic places in our towns and villages. Professionally trained counselors should be posted to these centers to render expert assistance, particularly to young people in areas of their educational and vocational and persona-social concerns. The status of such counselors should be enhanced through attractive remunerations and provision of adequate support services to their duties, thereby impacting positively on the lives of the people including youth.

Virtues of-honesty-; hardwork, respect for age, patriotism and dignity of labour should be restored in the wider society. The mass media should be effectively employed in this enterprise. The adult members of society should be made to wake up to their duly providing role models for the youth. This will enhance youth as well as overall national development.

Conclusion

The central position of youth in national development efforts cannot be contested. However, for youth to contribute to national development, they must first achieve personal development. Some psychological, social and economic factors have tended to impede youth development. The professional counselor, working in close cooperation with the family and relevant government agencies, can help the youth of the country to achieve their potentials.

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